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Does the effect of labels on sustained attention depend on target familiarity?

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Abstract

The ability to sustain attention on a target in the presence of distractors is critical for learning and development. Recent work has suggested that labeling a target object facilitates childrens performance in tasks requiring attentional selection, with a proposed mechanism relying on the enhancement of the target representation in working memory. In this pre-registered study, we tested this hypothesis by examining the effect of label familiarity on sustained attention. If labels influence how strongly targets are represented in working memory, then more familiar labels should show a larger benefit relative to less familiar labels. We discuss the results in the context of theories of language and cognition, and their contribution to understanding the mechanisms supporting the development of selective sustained attention.

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